

Testimony to Senate Fish and Game Committee
SB 151
Tuesday January 28, 2013
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SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 1-29-13
BILL NO. SB 151

My name is Mac Minard and I serve as the Executive Director of Montana Outfitters and Guides Association (MOGA).

I rise in support of SB 151, a bill that will provide temporary relief from a very controversial Commission decision affecting archery elk hunting in nearly one-third of the state of Montana. This bill seeks relief from Commission regulations that have had negative impacts socially, biologically and economically.

The Archery elk permit system is simply a piece of **Public Policy that has Benefits and Costs**. Benefits and Costs accrue to, and affect, a very broad spectrum of Montana Residents and Nonresidents. This is not a partisan issue or a resident non-resident issue. It is an issue of reviewing this Public Policy and determining IF the Benefits exceed the Costs in the mind of Montana Legislators.

I draw you attention to page 4 of my hand out

Benefits

Reduced Hunter Density – We are now down to one hunter per 2.5 sq miles (on average) of prime elk habitat for the full archery season. That is an extraordinary allocation of opportunity for a single hunter and must clearly enhance the experience.

Increased Hunter Success – Archery hunters have presumably improved individual success in taking an elk under the permit system with fewer in the field. I requested data on this from the Department and expect to receive it any time now.

Equity between Rifle and Archery hunters – I am unclear if this is a benefit or not but it was offered as a reason to do impose this program. The efficiency of the rifle hunter far exceeds that of the archery hunter and is therefore limited as an issue of conservation. Limiting the archer simply because you limited the rifle seems to place this in category of limiting opportunity in the face of biological surplus. It would seem similar to limiting family firewood cutting just because professional logging is limited or not allowed.

Costs

Lost Hunting Opportunity in the Face of Biological Surplus – Elk Herds were generally over objective in the districts where this program was imposed. In the interviewing years they have grown to 230% over objective. Yet we denied hunting opportunity to over 5500 resident and 6500 non-resident archery hunters over the past four years. This has resulted in hunter shift due to displacement causing crowding problems where they did not occur before.

Lost Commerce in Rural Communities – You will hear first-hand of the devastating economic impact this policy has had on small town eastern Montana. Although we cannot be sure of the exact economic impact it could be as much as \$20 million. In a rural community a job is a treasured thing and this policy has cost jobs in the tourism and service sector of the economy.

Lost License Revenue for FWP – The Department is in fiscal crisis. This program of severely restricting hunting opportunity, specifically targeting non-residents, cost the state \$328,000 in 2012 alone and over a million dollars since the program was put in place. There are those who think that is fine, however, MOGA is not one of them. We desire a well-funded and functioning professional Department. These revenues are sorely needed. The increase in license fees required of resident hunters to make up this difference is far beyond that which they are willing to pay. SB 151 will reverse this trend and as shown by the positive fiscal note, go a long way toward closing the fiscal gap.

Severely Damaged Landowner Sportsmen Relations – Landowner and sportsmen relations may be at an all-time low with no sign of improvement. The perception on the part of landowners is that this policy is directed at them in a punitive manner to leverage access. I have heard from Department staff that this effort was intended to increase access and on that count it has failed miserably. There is now less private land in this area available for public hunting than there was in 2007. We hear stories of ranches dropping out of Block Management in protest to how the landowner feels they have been treated. Perhaps the most egregious statement concerning the Archery Elk Permit program I personally witnessed was made by then Commission Ron Moody when he told me and one other person that **“I intend to make things so bad that people will come to the table”**. That statement captures the punitive environment under which this piece of public policy was crafted and explains why landowner relations are in such disarray. SB 151 will send a message to landowners that their views matter.

Wasted Opportunity – In the last three years 2,572 or about 13% of Montanan’s who receive this coveted permit never exercised it legally. They successfully drew but did not buy the requisite bow stamp to allow them to hunt. In 2012, 941 successful residents elected to not participate which was more than the entire NR draw of 804.

Decline in NR Interest in Montana – Please refer to the last page of my handout. This graphic demonstrates that Non-resident interest in Big Game hunting in Montana has declined a whopping 40 to 50 percent. While some may celebrate this result, it is the exact reason the Department is in on the verge of fiscal crisis. 70 percent of the Department license revenues come from non-residents and when you suffer that large of a decline in NR interest you can be assured that it will have consequences. This decline is not entirely attributable to the permit system but taken as a whole Non-resident don’t feel welcome when faced with this type of public policy. SB 151 will send a strong message that Montana welcomes non-residents who come to share and enjoy what the state has to offer. In return they help us sustain our life style.

In Closing

SB 151 will provide immediate and needed relief under a two year sunset to what clearly is a policy where the COSTS far outweigh the benefits.

In supporting SB 151 you will

- Provide hunting opportunity consistent with abundance
- Significantly help address FWP Budget shortfall
- Restore Landowner relations that may provide greater access
- Boost rural economies in Eastern Montana
- Instill non-resident confidence in Montana

I ask your support and urge a DO PASS

Review of Benefits and Costs of Commission Policy on Limited Archery Permits for Elk in Missouri Breaks and 21 Adjacent Hunting Districts

BENEFITS

Reduced Archery Hunter Density

- Average 2 sq. miles of elk habitat/hunter for five weeks

Increased Hunter Success

- Assumption of higher success with fewer hunters to compete with

Equity between Rifle and Archery

- We limit rifle so we should limit archery

COSTS

Lost Hunting Opportunity

- 12,000 res and non res hunters denied opportunity to hunt in the face of large biological surplus

Lost Commerce in Rural Communities

- Up to \$20 million
- Lost Jobs

Lost License Revenue for FWP

- \$320,000 last year alone
- Over one million since the program started

Severely Damaged Landowner/Sportsmen Relations

- Less Private land open to public hunting
- Negatively impacted Block Management participation
- Impacts effort to manage elk herds

Wasted Opportunity

- 900 residents failed to exercise the permit in 2012
- Avg of 13 % of Res permits are wasted each year
- Exceeds the total of 804 NR permitted to draw in 2012

50% Decline in NR interest in Montana

- NR account for 70% of the FWP License revenues
- Severe fiscal impacts even beyond this area

